

Maribyrnong

Immigration Detention Centre

- 8.1 The IDC was built in 1966, with a capacity of about 80 people. As with the other centres visited by the Committee, Maribyrnong was operating at, or close to, capacity. When the Committee visited it held 78 detainees (59 males and 19 females), including 8 minors, all of whom were accompanied.
- 8.2 Of the detainees, nearly half were in detention because they had arrived without authority and had been refused entry (22) or had overstayed or were otherwise in breach of their visa conditions (15). The main nationalities represented at the time of the Committee's visit were Chinese (22) and Iranian (14).

Management and Staffing

- 8.3 The committee was able to discuss the issue of staff recruitment with the centre managers, ACM. A recent briefing on prospective employment had drawn an audience of about 90. However, this field was significantly reduced by the briefing which explained the nature of the work; through subsequent character checks; and through psychological testing. ACM emphasised that the detention centre environment required a different staff approach to that normally found in the prison system.

Detention

- 8.4 Half of the detainees (39) had been in detention for less than three months and 16 had been in detention for longer than a year.
- 8.5 Families are normally kept together as a unit. However, when the Committee visited, families had been split up because of the need to maximise the amount of accommodation available.
- 8.6 Men were in a separate area from women and children. Communication was by message through a central control booth, but husbands were allowed to visit the women's area during the day.
- 8.7 The daily routine was structured around the meal times.¹ Visitors were permitted from 9.30-11.00 am; 2.30-5.00 pm; and 7.30-9.00 pm. When the Committee inspected the visiting area was in use.

Amenities

- 8.8 The centre has a laundry, two common rooms (one for men, the other for women), and a visiting room. There are a number of outdoor exercise areas provided. In the women's area there is a bituminised courtyard and a grassed area. The men had access to a large paved area, but another large grassed yard was closed to detainees at the time of the Committee's visit due to escapes over the surrounding fences.

Health

- 8.9 The Committee was not given any detailed briefing on the health centre, but understands that nurse care is available daily, and there are regular visits by medical practitioners.
- 8.10 The women's common room had an exercise bike and a treadmill. In the men's exercise area outside there were weight machines and a boxing bag.
- 8.11 Massage therapy was available twice per week, and the Committee was told that it was always booked out. As at Perth IDC, the Committee was told that it was provided for its calming effect on individual agitated detainees.

¹ Breakfast (7.30-8.00 am); Lunch (12.00-12.30 pm); Tea, (5.15-5.45 pm); and Supper (9.00-9.30 pm).

Interpreting Services

- 8.12 DIMA advice is that mainly European languages are spoken by staff and/or interpreters, but detainees have access to On-Call Interpreters as well.

Education

- 8.13 Well-patronised English classes are conducted on weekdays between 9.00 am and 3.00 pm, providing instruction at four levels of skill. In addition, four of the children in detention attended a school outside the centre. Following a complaint from a detainee about one child attending an inappropriate denominational school, this arrangement was being reviewed by the centre.
- 8.14 The centre provides a sewing skills course which allows female detainees to make clothes for themselves and their children, using materials provided by ACM.

Cultural

- 8.15 One room in the centre had been reserved for use as a mosque by detainees. The Committee was advised that inter-ethnic tensions which might be found in the broader community were largely absent in the centre.
- 8.16 At the time of the lunar New Year festival, arrangements were made to permit all detainees to vary their routine by having their meals later in the afternoon than normally scheduled and to participate in the cultural activities in the recreation area. A chef was employed to provide appropriate catering for the main ethnic groups at the centre.

Recreation

- 8.17 In both the men's and women's common rooms there was extensive reading material available and a pay phone. The women's room had a sewing machine, computer, television with Foxtel, radio and a table tennis table, and milk and biscuits were available. In the men's room there were

two TV sets, a computer with video games, a pool table, a table tennis table and a soft drink machine. Both men and women had an outdoor recreation area.

- 8.18 Once a fortnight the evening meal arrangements were varied by the inclusion of a barbecue and cultural singing and dancing.
- 8.19 Detainees could volunteer to assist in the centre. At the time of the Committee's visit some were helping with the painting which was in progress. "Points" accrued as a result could be converted to soft drinks, cigarettes, or phone cards.

Security

- 8.20 Detainee's visitors are required to identify themselves with a passport, a current visa, or an Australian driver's licence. Prior to being given access to detainees, the visitors' belongings are placed in a locker, and the visitors pass through a metal detector. Visitors are required to sign out.
- 8.21 Like Villawood, Maribyrnong has the disadvantage of being surrounded by suburbs and buildings, which make escapees difficult to apprehend. There had been six escapes in the year to date. Three escapees had been recaptured. As a result of the escapes the larger exercise yard was unavailable to detainees until the perimeter security was improved.

Conclusion

- 8.22 As at the Perth IDC, the Committee could see the benefits of the provision of massage therapy for detainees, and understood the reasons for its use. The Committee, however, doubted that such opportunities needed to be provided to all detainees. As with the Perth IDC, the Committee was concerned that provision of such therapy would be misinterpreted both by the Australian public and the detainees. Therefore the Committee reiterates its previous recommendation (No. 11) that:

the practice of providing massage to detainees on a regular basis is discontinued, and that massage is only provided when recommended by a doctor for substantial medical reasons.²

2 See Chapter 6.

- 8.23 Maribyrnong, although an old facility, remains functional. At the time of the Committee's visit families could not be retained as units because of the lack of space but this was not considered by the Committee to be a permanent state of affairs.
- 8.24 The Committee noted the plans for improved security and noted that the re-opening of the large recreation areas would ease pressure on the existing communal areas.

Recommendation 13

- 8.25 **The Committee recommends that the necessary security upgrading be undertaken as a matter of priority, both to improve security and permit fuller use of the centre's grounds.**

